



Technology Juggernaut

Rhonda Lee brings Louisiana-style enthusiasm to her school district.

Don't even think about getting in Rhonda Lee's way when she wants something. This vibrant technology supervisor has brought computers, networks, and Internet access to rural Louisiana, mainly through grant funds.

Rhonda is a firm believer in the power of the public school system. "I was a public school kid, my mama taught public school." But, Rhonda didn't start at public schools. She always wanted to work at St. James, but they didn't have a position for her. So she "started at these little Catholic schools doing part-time work with computers," waiting until something opened up in public schools. Her first position in 1991 was not exactly what she expected—"I was left in charge of 700 eighth graders, computer lit, no type of real curriculum"—but she did what she needed to do to get the job she wanted. Like many ISTE members who want to grow into leadership positions, Rhonda went back to school. "I learned everything. My goal for my life was to provide my students with the best technology-enhanced education." That technology position opened up for her in 1997.

Like so many public school districts, St. James Parish struggles with funding. Seventy percent of their

Name: Rhonda Lee

Job Title: Technology Supervisor

Location: St. James Parish Schools, Litcher, Louisiana

ISTE Member Since: January 2002

Favorite Ed Tech Moment: When a teacher who had been struggling to learn technology came running up to her at a wedding and said, "I opened my lesson plan on e-mail! I got the attachment, Rhonda!"

Photos and story by L&L staff



students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and the district budget is not adequate to pay for much technology. So Rhonda goes after any and every grant she can find. She has received E-Rate funds, Technology Literacy Challenge Grant money, state aid, and corporate contributions.

The district has been using these funds to rebuild its schools from the ground up, creating a Blueprint for Better Schools. Schools are merging so students have fewer transitions and have more interaction with students from rival schools. It's been an exciting time for Rhonda. "We've been on this adventure, on this journey, and it hasn't ended yet," she says. "The journey included taking an elementary school, moving it to a junior high school, doing all the renovations, providing it with pretty much the best. Then we placed the seventh- and eighth-grade students in a high school situation. So we had to rebuild things, restructure things, and think about how things were going."

Rhonda credits many things in her district's success. Louisiana has invested heavily in technology in the last few decades. Rhonda can't stop talking about all of the wonderful people in her district who help her get things done—the technical support workers,

the teachers, the principals, even the construction workers who worked day and night to make sure school renovations were completed over the summer, in just two and a half months. She also credits ISTE resources. Louisiana adopted the NETS as their state technology standards, so she uses the NETS materials frequently (and with the challenges from NCLB, she wants more resources for assessing the NETS). ISTE's books and articles help her prove her points to her higher-ups. "I can say, 'Look at this article, look at where they're going,'" she says. "Right now, I have my supervisor with a misconception of where the Palm fits in." She just uses the books on handhelds and the articles in the recent issues of *L&L* to prove that they are worthwhile investments. Truth be told, even Rhonda was a late convert to handhelds. "I let my technicians push me. I'm a little bit on the scared side, every now and then." So she used her handheld and learned, "Wow! Wow! Wow! It's not just a word processor. It's everything!"

Teachers are her next step in integrating handhelds into her schools. As coordinator for professional development, she can

ensure that teachers get training in the technology they already have and the technology they will need. So, she says, "I think I'm going to buy a few Palms and when we start doing inservices, somehow incorporate it and let them beam to each other. And then when they see the capability, they're going to want it." With Rhonda's infectious enthusiasm and obvious joy to have achieved so much in her district, you know it will happen!

